

THE *Current*

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Voters Give Obama High Marks, According to New Zogby Poll

In his inaugural address, Barack Obama called for "a new era of responsibility." Recently, he pointed to a "confidence gap, when it comes to the American people," and acknowledged the need to "earn their trust." How is Obama doing in terms of responsibility and transparency? Has he delivered on his promise to restore the trust and confidence in the American people?

Ethics specialist Jim Lichtman and Wade Clark Roof, director of UC Santa Barbara's Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life will answer these questions and more as they discuss the findings of their recent Zogby poll, "The First 100 Days -- Integrity, Leadership, Trust." The event begins at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 18, at the Granada Theater. It is free and open to the public. A reception will follow in the McCune Founders Room.

The interactive survey, commissioned by the Capps Center and authored by Roof and Lichtman, was conducted from April 28-30 and included 3,367 likely voters across the country.

"This poll is unlike the others on Obama's first 100 days," said Roof. "Four months ago we asked Americans what qualities they were looking for in a president, and now we have asked them to evaluate the president on these very qualities -- integrity, honesty, fairness, vision of the country."

Overall, 54 percent gave Obama a positive job performance rating in the survey. Nearly six in ten respondents -- 58 percent -- gave Obama positive marks for his honesty and integrity, while 59 percent gave him positive marks for his leadership during his first 100 days in office. These are the qualities respondents said were most important to them in the Capps Center survey conducted after the November 2008 election.

A news release issued recently by the Capps Center explains the survey's findings in detail. The text follows:

Zogby Poll:

Voters Trust Obama Though Partisan Divide Remains

Unique 100 DAYS Survey Confirms What Americans Want Most: Integrity, Leadership and Trust

Faced with serious financial crises and the potential outbreak of a flu pandemic, President Obama has won stellar grades for his leadership and integrity during his eventful first 100 days in office, but he has failed to unify the country, a new Zogby interactive survey shows.

Overall, 54 percent gave Obama a positive job performance rating in the survey commissioned by the Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion and Public Life, based at the University of California at Santa Barbara. The poll is unique because it focused largely on personal qualities and issues that Americans said were most important in a poll taken immediately after the November presidential election.

The study was authored by writer and ethics specialist Jim Lichtman and Capps Center Director Wade Clark Roof.

"What's important about this study," Lichtman says, "is that we asked Americans - in open-ended questions last November - what qualities the country needs most in the next president, and what issues were most important to them.

We then went back into the field for the 100 Days survey and asked voters to grade both Obama and Congress on those same qualities and issues."

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The new Capps survey was conducted from April 28-30. It included 3,367 likely voters and carries a margin of error of +/- 1.7 percentage points.

Just over half of the respondents – 52 percent – said they believe Obama is moving the country in the right direction, a significant improvement over those who said the same thing in polling before Obama took office. Another 47 percent said they did not have confidence Obama was leading the nation in the right direction. On this question there was a notable partisan split – while 90 percent of Democrats said they thought Obama was heading the country in the right direction, just 11 percent of Republicans agreed. Independents were split, with 48 percent thinking the new President has set the correct course and 51 percent saying they did not have such confidence.

Congress Still Unloved by Voters

While Obama scored well for his personal qualities, the Capps study confirms that Congress remains unloved by poll respondents nationwide. Rating the transparency of Congress, just 18 percent gave it positive marks. Asked about restoring trust in government, just 18 percent gave Congress a positive rating. Almost one in four – 23 percent – gave it good marks for honesty, while 22 percent gave it positive marks for integrity. It performed much better on the question of how it works with Obama – 45 percent said it has so far done a good job working with the new President.

Likely voters gave Obama very high marks for his personal intelligence, as 78 percent gave him a positive rating. 56 percent said they had confidence in his vision for the country. Intelligence and Vision were additional qualities voters said the new president should demonstrate.

In every one of these areas, women gave Obama higher marks than did men.

Nation Split on Key Obama Policy Choices

The nation is split on how they rank his leadership in fixing the economy and dealing with health care – 49 percent said they feel Obama has offered good leadership on the economy, while 46 percent said the same about his efforts on health care; two issues cited as important to voters in the post-election Capps study.

Just 44 percent gave him good marks for stabilizing or cutting taxes, perhaps the result of Obama's stimulus bill signed into law earlier this year that featured massive spending by the federal government.

On the question of restoring the public's trust in government, 50 percent said Obama has made good efforts in that direction, while 48 percent gave him negative marks in that area.

In terms of uniting the country, likely voters are, well, not united. While 52 percent said they did not have confidence that Obama was up to the task, 47 percent said they think he is.

Responses to this question had a notable and predictable partisan split – 82 percent of Democrats but just 13 percent of Republicans said they had confidence Obama would succeed on this point.

"Political ideology drives the numbers," Wade Clark Roof said, but notes that "Obama's job approval is about the same, if not better, than that of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush in the early months of their presidencies."

Asked whether they thought Obama was more likely to act based on the best interests of the country or what helps him politically, 50 percent said they thought he was more likely to act in the country's best interest, versus 45 percent who believe that he places politics ahead of the country's needs.

55 percent said they have confidence that President Obama "has the character and the courage to do the right thing in handling a crisis," and 49 percent said they are optimistic that he will live up to the expectations of the nation.

"Looking at the first 100 Days of any president is something that has become more customary than reflective of serious assessment," Lichtman says.

"The real measure of Obama's leadership won't come for at least seven to nine months; certainly sooner, if voters can see results from his economic policies as well as the larger issue of health care reform - something November voters said they most want both the president and Congress to accomplish after fixing the economy."

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